DISCOVERING THE MAIDEN GODDESS

by Shekhinah Mountainwater

A group of sisters in Oregon put on a Goddess gathering one summer, featuring the topic "Is there a fourth aspect to the Goddess?". Hearing about this got me thinking that the answer might be yes, the Dark Maiden.

I first learned about this Goddess from a lover, who used to call me her "dark maiden," and point out the waning crescent in the late night sky.

She would explain that there are two crescents and two maidens. The Bright Maiden corresponds to the waxing crescent, curving towards the right. The Dark Maiden corresponds to the waning crescent, curving towards the left. Over the years, I have discovered the beauty of this symbol system and its potential to give healing and enpowerment to women.

We all know about the great triad : Maiden, Mother and Crone. This three fold archetype resonates deeply in our psyches as Begining, Middle and End of all things, and is likely to be with us always. Yet a fourth aspect might appear within the triad -- as well as a fifth or sixth. "When the myths come alive for us they change," says Starhawk. Truly, there are no limits to the Goddess, and all things are possible.

But why the special attention to the Bright and Dark Maiidens? For one thing, they make a marvelous all-female alternative to the male-opposite-female symbolism of patriarchy. The Bright Maiden who waxes, moves towards the Light and the Sun. She is the young Goddess who is growing, the Amazon, the woman who takes her powers of freedom, action, strength and independence. She is the risk-taker, the woman who dares. in other words, she is all things our society tells us should be considered "male." Because of our loss of Her image in our psyches, women find themselves accused of becoming "like a man," when they express Her qualities. Known to us as Diana, Artemis, Boudicea, the Amazon Warrior Woman... the Bright Maiden is more familiar to us than the Dark.

The Dark Maiden who wanes, moves towards the Underworld, The Crone. She is associated with aging, descent, introspection and magic. The Dark Maiden is teh enchantress, She Who Pulls. In her positive attributes, She represents some of the lost powers of woman. She surrenders to the flow and pulls, like the pull of the moon, the suction of the undertow. This is the magnetism of magic, our power to draw to us all that we require. Images of the Dark Maiden appear to us as Persephone, Queen of the Underworld, the Mermaid, Sirens, Sorceress.

In patriarchy the Bright and Dark Maidens tend to appear in negative expression, and because of this, our impression of them can become destorted. Patriarchs love to keep our Dark Maidens weak and dependent upon them, and if we decide to act out of our Bright Maiden selves, they insist we do so "like a man." These are some of the reasons why it is so important for us to find woman-identified symbols for these parts of ourselves; Goddesses that are soft and strong, magickal and free -- female expressions

of these qualities.

DARK MAIDEN :	AFFLICTED	LIBERATED
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	Weak	Surrendering
	Flaky	Spontaneous
	Passive	Pulling
	Victim	Supporting
	Self-Sacrificing	Compassionate
	"Loser"	Gentle
	Myopic	Subjective
	Over-reacting	Intuitive
	Deluded	Imaginative

BRIGHT MAIDEN :	AFFLICTED	LIBERATED
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	Hard Boiled	Strong
	Superficial	In control
	Hyper-rational	Organized
	Militant	Disciplined
	Aloof	Independent
	Unemotional	Objective
	Mechanical	Scientific
	Power-over	Power-from-within
	Careless	Playful

The main thing to remember about the Dark Maiden is that She has the power to Respond. She is the receptive and sensative part of us, which we need for successful magic as well as personal wholeness. She is tender and vulnerable, and it is important to keep our Bright Maiden qualities so we can protect Her. Too many women with Dark Maiden qualities become victims in our society, subject to the will of others. And too many Bright Maidens become cold and hard. Feminist spirituality teaches us that we have been programmed to act out these qualities in ways that men have devised. Liberation lies not in discarding them, but in learning to reclaim
them in their older, female expressions.

Inevitably, this process will lead us back to the Three-fold and Five fold expressions of the Goddess, because they offer flow and continium. They teach us that any one quality when isolated at the expense of the others becomes destructive and limiting. WHile the Bright and Dark Maidens do pair off and become partners, companions and lovers...they can be seen within the larger contexts of Maiden, Mother and Crone, or Fire, Water, Air, Earth and Spirit. Sometimes I picture the two Maidens as Warrior and Priestess within a cycle that includes Mother, Grandmother, and Lover. Sometimes I see them as the Fall and Spring Equinoxes, known to the ancient
Greeks as the Anados (Goddess arising) and Kathados (Goddess Descending). Thus we can integrate the duality of our Bright and Dark Maidens into the three-fold, five-fold and eight-fold (the eight holy days of the year) cycles of Life and Being.

This article is but a glimpse into the possibilities. I invite you to search within yourself, in myths and amoung symbols that you know, for signs of the Bright and Dark Maidens.

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images and discussions of the maiden Goddesses....